

demystifying detox diets

The popularity of detox, or cleansing, diets has reached an all time high. With a number of celebrities touting their many benefits, it's hard not to wonder if there may be some validity to the claims.

Detox diets allege to “purify” the body, making such claims as accelerated weight loss, increased energy, clearer skin, improved sleep patterns, etc. The theory is that toxic substances stored in the body that cause harmful effects are turned into soluble substances that are flushed out of the body. Some of these diets include fasting, all juice diets, colonic cleansing, herbal preparations, caloric restriction, and raw foods diet, to name a few.

Detox advocates contend that toxicity levels have increased over the years with increased exposure to environmental toxins that can include pesticides, pollution, antibiotics and hormones in foods, and chemicals. They claim an individual's ability to get rid of these toxins is now compromised with increased exposure and build-up of toxins.

Scientific studies have yet to prove the effectiveness of any of these plans. And there are a number of risks associated with some of these diets that include dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, nutrient deficiencies, fatigue, bowel perforation from colonics, a sluggish metabolism from severely restricting calories, and weight gain once a normal diet is resumed. Drastic, very restrictive diets can also cause an increase in cortisol levels, the stress hormone that promotes fat storage.

In reality, none of these diets can change the form of toxins in the body to release them. The body's own ability to metabolize food along with the help of detoxifying organs (like the liver and kidneys) are all you need to purify and maintain a healthy body, especially when combined with a healthy diet.

There are ways to “eat clean” so that your body will not have to work as hard to purify the system. Follow these simple guidelines to feel better without spending a lot of money or suffering through drastic diets.

- Buy organic produce when possible to avoid excessive pesticide residue. Organic can be expensive, so if you can't afford to buy organic produce every time you shop, look up online the fruits and veggies that absorb the most of these chemicals. Some include apples, strawberries, peaches, lettuce, spinach, celery, and red bell peppers. Splurge on organic versions of these fruits and vegetables.
- When it comes to organic choices, the most bang for your buck is with organic dairy and meat products. Also, look for grass fed meats that are hormone and antibiotic free. Recent studies do show evidence of antibiotic resistance that can stem from overexposure to antibiotics present in the foods you eat.
- Avoid processed foods that are found primarily on the inside aisles of the supermarket. These foods are loaded with sugar, salt, preservatives, and chemicals.

- Select fish with lower levels of toxins. A good rule of thumb is to choose fish that are smaller and younger. Good choices include salmon, herrings, and sardines. The larger, older fish have consumed more pollutants in the water. Fish with higher toxin levels (including mercury) are tuna, tilefish, shark, swordfish, and king mackerel.
- Select foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids that reduce inflammation, such as salmon, walnuts, and flaxseed.
- Don't smoke and limit alcohol and caffeine consumption.

If you're still convinced you need a little extra help to feel better, or simply want to jump start a healthier diet plan, some people thrive on a more regimented approach to achieve health goals. Choose one of these diets that are not as drastic and last no longer than 1-2 days. This will give many people more of a mental edge to jump start a weight loss program or to simply eat healthier, rather than detoxifying the body.

Remember, any diet plan should be one that includes many of the foods you enjoy in order to work long-term. When in doubt, shop the periphery of the grocery store where you will find a great variety of whole foods.

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